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SUBJECT: MERCURY MANAGEMENT: ITALY NOW FAVORS A BINDING INSTRUMENT

REF: STATE 63943

¶1. Summary. On June 17, Post delivered reftel questions to Ms. Giuliana Gasparrini of the Environment Ministry (MOE) Directorate for Environmental Research and Development. Gasparrini heads the V Division, which deals with European Union (EU) and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) coordination and environmental research. On June 26, Mr. Marco Strincone of Gasparrini's staff sent a written reply. In summary, Italy appears to have adopted the EU position, and moved from support for a voluntary approach to support for a legally-binding instrument to solve mercury pollution problems, coupled with voluntary approaches, with operational details to be decided. End of summary.

¶2. According to the MOE's Strincone, the Italian Government (GOI) position - in accordance with that of the EU - is now in favor of both a legally-binding instrument and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) voluntary program. He states that, "given the complexity of the issue, a voluntary-only approach seems insufficient to deal with mercury pollution, which requires interventions at various levels." According to Strincone, previous informal discussions have underscored that the only partnership in UNEP's mercury program which is currently active is the UNEP-Global Partnership for Mercury Air Transport and Fate Research (UNEP-MFTP), in which both the GOI and the USG are involved. The other partnerships, he commented, have not produced the desired results.

¶3. Regarding a legally-binding instrument, the GOI - and the EU - still must decide if they want to include a mercury protocol in the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPS) or if they prefer a stand-alone instrument, which - Strincone added - "appears to have more advantages." In any case, the EU wants to create an instrument which does not overlap with already existing instruments (such as the Basel and Rotterdam Conventions), but supplements them, in order to make the most efficient use of resources and coordinate international efforts on chemicals and waste issues. Strincone noted that this would be in line with the results of the UNEP Ad Hoc Joint Working Group on strengthening cooperation and coordination between the different international instruments covering these areas.

¶4. Regarding timing for deciding a common EU position on the specifics of a mercury management proposal, Strincone said that "the EU will likely decide its priority areas and types of measures by September." He added that the MOE does not have any information on GOI or EU preferences for these specifics at this time.

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